

Message Text

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PARIS FROM BIEUT 15 MAY 73 REPEATED TO YOU QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5568

DEPT PASS USINT CAIRO

E. O. 11652: XGDS

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SUBJ: INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION

SUMMARY: OVER PAST FEW DAYS EMPHASIS OF GOL- FEDAYEEN CRISIS
HAS SHIFTED FROM ARMED CONFRONTATION TO POLITICAL STRUGGLE FOR
SUPPORT OF SUNNI MOSLEMS. ' ARAFAT AND JUMBLATT HAVE BEEN LEADING
EXPONENTS OF FEDAYEEN POSITION AND HAVE ATTRACTED CONSIDERABLE
FOLLOWING AMONG SUNNI POLITICIANS WITH WHOM THEY HAVE BEEN
HAVING ALMOST CONTINUOUS MEETINGS. FRANGIE, ON OTHER HAND,
ALSO MEETING WITH SUNNI LEADERS TO EXPOUND HIS WELL- KNOWN
POINT OF VIEW. AMONG ISSUES AT STAKE ARE FORMATION OF NEW
GOVT, CONTINUATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY, CONTENT OF AGREEMENT
BETWEEN GOL AND FEDAYEEN, AND " RIGHTS" OF MOSLEMS. FRANGIE
HAS BEEN HOLDING VERY FIRM, AND SUNNI BASE REMAINS RELATIVELY
QUEIT BEUT SUNNI POLITICIANS ARE BEHAVING IN TRADITIONAL FASHION
BY PUBLIC ADVOCACY OF PALESTINIAN, PAN- ARAB CAUSE. END
SUMMARY.

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1. OVER PAST THREE DAYS PRESIDENT FRANGIE HAS CONTINUED HOLD ONE MEETING AFTER ANOTHER WITH WIDE SELECTION OF POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS AND BUSINESS LEADERS. AMONG THEM HAVE BEEN LARGE NUMBER SUNNI MOSLEMS. HE HAS BEEN REPORTEDLY HOLDING VERY FIRMLY TO HIS PREVIOUSLY STATED VIEWS ON WHAT RELATIONSHIP SHOULD BE BETWEEN FEDAYEEN AND GOL, CALLING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO SITUATION IN OTHER ARAB STATES AND TO HIS STRONG OPPOSITION TO IDEA OF HAVING ARMED MEN CIRCULATING FREELY, TO FEDAYEEN BEING ABOVE LEBANESE LAW (" STATE WITHIN A STATE"), AND THREAT TO LEBANESE GOVT AND PEOPLE CAUSED BY HEAVY WEAPONS IN CAMPS IN AND AROUND MAJOR CITIES. IN TALKING WITH BUSINESSMEN HE IS RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE SAID " WE MUST THINK LEBANON BEFORE WE THINK ARAB AND PALESTINIAN". WHEN ASKED TO ABOLISH CURFEW WHICH HURTING BUSINESS HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT SUCH LOSSES ARE " RELATIVELY SECONDARY, AND NOT THE IMPORTANT FACTOR."

2. IN TALKING WITH FORMER PRIME MINISTER SAEB SALAM ON MAY 13, PRESIDENT RELIABLY REPORTED TO HAVE TAKEN VERY TOUGH LINE. SAEB CAME FROM MEETING OF SOME TWENTY SUNNI POLITICIANS AND BUSINESSMEN (EXCLUDING THOSE CLOSEST TO KARAME AND JUMBLATT) AND CLAIMED HE REPRESENTING SUNNI OPINION IN PRESSING FOR RAPID RESTORATION OF CIVILIAN GOVT AND AGREEMENT WITH FEDAYEEN ON BASIS OLD CAIRO ACCORDS. FRANGIE REPORTEDLY SIAD THAT SETTling QUESTION OF RELATIONS WITH FEDAYEEN SHOULD COME BEFORE NEW GOVT SINCE OTHERWISE NEW GOVT WOULD FALL INTO SAME TROUBLE AS HAD AMIN EL HAFEZ. HE ALSO REPORTEDLY TOLD SAEB SALAM THAT IF HE THAT ENAMoured OF FEDAYEEN HE COULD MOVE INTO CAMPS WITH THEM BUT THAT FRANGIE WOULD NEVER CONCEDE LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY EVEN IF CONFRONTATION STEMming THEREFROM LED TO ACTUAL GEOGRAPHICAL DIVISION OF COUNTRY IN WHICH SUNIS AND PALESTINIANS WOULD HAVE SEPARATE ENCLAVE. IN PRESIDENT' S MEETING MAY 14 WITH KAMAL JUMBLATT AND RACHID KARAME, WE UNDERSTAND THAT FORMER TOOK HIS USUAL FIRM STAND WHILE LATTER TWO REPEATED ESSENCE OF KARAME' S PRESENTATION PREVIOUS WEEK (SEE SITREP 15).

3. ' ARAFAT HAS MET SEVERAL TIME WITH SAEB SALAM, KARAME AND JUMBLATT OVER PAST THREE DAYS, AND ALSO WITH BROAD SPECTRUM OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS, ETC. WHILE BOTH FRANGIE AND CONFIDENTIAL

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' ARAFAT (WITH STRONG SUPPORT FROM KARAME AND JUMBLATT) CONCENTRATING ON SUNNI MOSLEMS, THEY NOT NEGLECTING CHRISTIANS. ' ARAFAT GETTING STRONG PROPAGANDA SUPPORT FROM RADIOS IN DAMASCUS, CAIRO, BAGHDAD, ETC. (GOOD SAMPLE OF MILDLY-WORDED SUPPORT CAN BE READ IN FBIS M142042 Z QUOTING CAIRO VOICE OF PALESTINE).

4. COMMENT: ONE EFFECT OF THESE MEETINGS HAS CLEARLY BEEN TO HEIGHTEN CONFESSIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS ON PART OF SUNNIS. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE OF SUNNI POLITICIANS, BUT WE HAVE SEVERAL REPORTS THAT THERE IS INCREASING FALL- OUT AMONG SUNNI RANK- AND- FILE(WHICH BEING VISITED ON ALMOSEHOUSE- TO- HOUSE BASIS IN SOME SECTORS BY FEDAYEEN REPS). THERE IS APPREHENSION THAT UNLESS CRISIS IS RESOLVED SOON ANY OUT- BREAK OF HOSTILITIES COULD PRODUCE CONFESSIONAL SPLIT WHICH HAS THUS FAR BEEN AVOIDED. ONE OF MAJOR REASONS NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DID NOT MEET ON MAY 14 WAS DESIRE BY CHRISTIAN DEPUTIES NOT TO HAVE MEETING IN WHICH THERE WAS NO RPT NO SUNNI SUPPORT FOR EXTENDING STATE OF EMERGENCY. THIS INCREASES PRESSURE FOR COMPROMISE BY FRANGIE AND FOR FORMATION NEW GOVT (OR RESURRECTION OF SOME- WHAT BEDRAGGLED AMIN EL HAFEZ) PRIOR TO CONCLUSION UNDERSTANDING WITH FEDAYEEN. LATTER ARE APPARENTLY ADDING TO THIS PRESSURE BY IMPLYING THEY CANNOT AGREE TO ANYTHING IN ABSENCE OF SUNNI PM. ON OTHER HAND, FRANGIE' S FIRM STAND MAY BRING HOME TO MANY SUNNIS AMONG UPPER AND MIDDLE CLASSES THAT THEY HAVE A LOT TO LOSE MATERIALLY IN PUSHING THEIR PAN- ARAB, PRO- PALESTINIAN SENTIMENTS TOO FAR. FRANGIE HAS THUS FAR PURSUED WITH SKILL AND COURAGE HIS OWN VARIETY OF BRINKSMANSHIP. HOUGHTON UNQUOTE RUSH

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